Fighting the Soviet Imperialists: UNITA in Angola

"Out with the Cubans! Out with the Russians! Death to Marxism! Vive the independence of Angola!" A first-hand report on Angola's anti-Soviet guerrilla movement.

JACK WHEELER | FROM THE APRIL 1984 ISSUE

At four o'clock in the morning on an October day last year, I boarded an unmarked 4-engine turboprop at the airport of a black-African capital. The plane was to take me on a clandestine flight into the heart of rebel-held territory in Angola to meet the legendary guerrilla chieftain Jonas Savimbi and get an in-depth look at his UNITA forces, which have been fighting Angola's rulers—first the Portuguese colonizers, now the Soviet-backed Marxist regime—since 1966. It was the beginning of a new leg of my multi-continent investigation of Third World anti-Soviet insurgents.

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I had just come from some weeks with the Mujaheddin in Afghanistan, with whom everything is informal and spontaneous; so I was not ready for it when a UNITA man insisted, before we could take off for Angola, that I fill out an immigration form asking, among many other things, my mother's maiden name—*in triplicate.* "What have I got on my hands here?" I muttered to myself as I filled out the form. "Gilbert and Sullivan guerrillas?" In the ensuing month I would find myself repeatedly asking that same question. But I was to become convinced that the story of Savimbi and UNITA is one of the most extraordinary in the history of guerrilla warfare. What is going on in Angola may have some outward trappings of comic opera in the African bush. But in their fight against Angola's ruling regime—in power since 1975—Savimbi's men are deadly serious. Very serious, and very deadly.

The flight into Angola's rebel-held territory lasted several hours. I was asked by my UNITA hosts not to disclose from where we departed—only that it was a black country, not South Africa or Namibia. As daylight spread, we traveled at normal flight altitude across thousands of square miles of eastern Angola, yet the Portuguese crew was unconcerned about attacks from government missiles or MiG jet fighters. "All this," the captain informed me, pointing through the cockpit window to the sandy-green landscape below, "is controlled by UNITA. There is simply no government presence down there." Savimbi's Kingdom.

The Portuguese, who began colonizing Africa in the 15th century, called this part of Angola "Terras do Fin do Mundo"—the Land at the End of the World. In 1976, Savimbi and a few remnants of his forces had retreated deep into this bush, defeated and broken by the regime that had been installed when the Portuguese bowed out. Now Savimbi controlled it all—and much more. Several knowledgeable people had told me that he is the most interesting man in all of Africa. I was now about to find out why.

Jonas Malheiro Savimbi was born on August 3, 1934, in the town of Munango on the Benguela Railway. A United Church missionary once described Savimbi's parents as being of "exceedingly humble, primitive, pagan background." But both were converted to Christianity, and Lote Savimbi, Jonas's father, proceeded to become the railway station master at Munango and to found Munango's first Protestant church. This upset the local Catholic priests, who got Lote transferred to another station, where he proceeded to found another Protestant church. This pattern was repeated several times along the railway from Munango to Benguela.

Lote Savimbi's life-long independence and resistance to repressive authority, the guerrilla leader would later tell me, was a lesson young Jonas learned well. Lote also gave his son an impassioned nationalism. For Lote, the great symbol of freedom in the world was America. "My father always thought that black Americans would someday come and help free our country from Portuguese colonialism," Savimbi told me during one of our talks. "And I have not lost hope that they may someday play a role in freeing us from that of the Soviets."

In 1958, the United Church sent Savimbi to study medicine in Lisbon, where the Portuguese secret police tried to get him to inform on fellow Angolan students who opposed Portuguese rule in Angola. Savimbi refused and fled to Switzerland. By this time, 1961, two Angolan liberation movements had formed—Agostinho Neto's MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertoqao de Angola) and Holden Roberto's UPA, later FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertagao de Angola).

On his own, Savimbi went to a seminar on African liberation movements in Kampala, Uganda, where he met Tom Mboya, Kenya's foreign minister. Mboya introduced Savimbi to Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta, who advised him to give up medicine: "It is better for you to help free your people and have doctors in a free Angola, than for you to be a doctor in a colonial Angola." But Kenyatta advised him against joining the MPLA. "They are communists," Kenyatta warned him, "and have been supported by the Soviets since 1957."

On a Swiss-government scholarship for political refugees, Savimbi returned to Switzerland and changed from medicine to political science at the University of Lausanne. Flitting back and forth between Africa and Lausanne, to the eternal confusion of his professors, he obtained his doctorate in July 1965. (His dissertation topic was the implications of Yalta on the Third World.)

In the meantime, armed with an introduction from Kenya's Mboya, Savimbi teamed up with Holden Roberto's liberation movement. But Savimbi says he soon became disillusioned. He explains that Roberto was French-educated in what was then the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) and "didn't understand the Portuguese mentality" or how to fight it. He couldn't expand his power base beyond his own Bakongo tribe, nor would he himself go inside Angola to fight, preferring to remain safe in Zaire's capital, Kinshasa. And Savimbi noticed that Roberto didn't trust those around him who had an education, as they might become rivals to his power.

So in 1964, Savimbi left Roberto's FNLA, determined to fight the Portuguese inside Angola with his own movement. Seeking support, he approached Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, who turned him down. He saw Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, who said no. (That year he also met Che Guevara, whom he personally liked but didn't think was very bright.) Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser said no, as well, but had Savimbi taken to Moscow to petition the Soviets for aid. It was an educational experience. "The Russians were very insulting to me," he recalls. "They demanded I work with the MPLA. Worst of all, they were genuine racists. You could see it in their eyes."

Finally, early in 1965, Savimbi met Hua Hua, China's ambassador to Egypt, who invited him to Peking. There, the Chinese listened to him—and told him that he had good ideas but would fail without proper training. They gave him $15,000 and told him to come back with 12 recruits. He returned with the recruits at the end of 1965 for nine solid months of intense training in political-indoctrination techniques and guerrilla tactics.

With 150 men recruited among Angolans who had fled to Zambia to escape a Portuguese crackdown on insurgents, and armed only with knives, Savimbi led his first attack on December 1, 1966. The Portuguese garrison at Cassamba was the target. One of Savimbi's men was killed, and they retreated. Then on December 25, Savimbi scored his first victory, overrunning a garrison at Luau. It was the first the world heard of UNITA—União Nacional Para a Independencia Total de Angola, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

Six months later, Savimbi was back in Peking, where he met Mao himself. Mao gave him $50,000 and promised a large supply of guns and ammo for UNITA, to be shipped through Tanzania and Zambia. "As a guerrilla leader and tactician, Mao was an unrivaled genius," Savimbi now observes. "But his ideas and methods on running a society and its economy should be avoided at all costs."

Savimbi remembers being in high spirits when he arrived in Zambia on July 7, 1967. But the next day, under pressure from both Portugal and the United Kingdom, Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda had Savimbi arrested. Nasser used diplomatic pressure to get him released, after which he spent nine months in exile in Cairo. (Savimbi says that when the boat-land of Chinese weapons arrived in Tanzania, Nyerere kept them for himself.)

During that sojourn in Cairo, Nasser kept pressuring him to be pro-Soviet, says Savimbi, but he rejected Nasser's urgings and in May 1968 secretly left Cairo for Switzerland. By July, with the help of Sam Nujoma of SWAPO—the South West Africa People's Organization, a guerrilla group fighting South African rule of Namibia—Savimbi had slipped back into Angola. "It was Sam Nujoma who gave me my first pistol," Savimbi was to tell me. "It's a shame he has gone over to the Soviets. I warned him, and now we must be enemies."

Savimbi never made the mistake of leaving Angola again. Soon he had a bush insurgency rivaling the Marxist MPLA and Holden Roberto's Western-backed FNLA.

Originally, all three of these movements had a tribal basis. The MPLA originated among the Kimbundu in the central-west. Its Marxist ideology made it the favorite among intellectuals in Luanda, Angola's capital; its strategy was to propagandize urban workers and civil servants, gaining power in the cities, above all Luanda. The FNLA arose among the Bakongo in the north; its strategy was to force the support of the local people through straightforward brutal terrorism, while convincing white businessmen in Luanda and Portugal that it was the only alternative to a communist takeover.

Savimbi is Ovimbundu, which is by far the largest of Angola's eight principal Bantu groups, and he began among them. (The eight major Bantu tribes are: Ovimbundu [40–45 percent of the total Angolan population of six or seven million], Bakongo, Kimbundu, Chokwe, Ovambo, Herrero, Lunda, and Ganguela. Some ethnologists distinguish Kwangali from Ganguela. There are also the non-Bantu Khoisa, or Bushmen.) Savimbi applied Mao's advice of first getting to know the peasants, the local villagers, and gain their trust. He spent months talking to villagers and tribal chiefs, acquiring their support and allegiance. "You must be very careful with the peasants," he advises. "Once you make a mistake, they take a long time to forgive you."

He also started reaching out to other tribes, appealing to a pantribal Angolan nationalism. Savimbi's right-hand man, with him since 1961, is Miguel N'zau Puna, a Bakongo from Cabinda province, an Angolan coastal enclave wedged between Zaire and the Republic of the Congo. Two other key lieutenants with him since the mid-'60s are Antonio Vakulukuta, an Ovambo, and Smart Chata, a Chokwe.

By early 1974, UNITA was the only group actively fighting the Portuguese inside Angola. Neto's MPLA had been pushed by the Portuguese army into Zambia; Roberto's FNLA, into Zaire. Then in April, a military coup in Lisbon brought to power a new regime that was willing to end the drawn-out conflict in Angola and withdraw Portugal's colonial claims there. A leftist officer, Rear Admiral Antonio Rosa Coutinho, was appointed head of a military council to govern Angola until independence.

On January 15, 1975, the three liberation groups that had been fighting the Portuguese in Angola signed an agreement to jointly form a provisional government, with neutrally supervised general elections to be held before Independence Day, November 11, 1975. But the elections were never held. Behind the scenes, according to Savimbi, Coutinho, himself a socialist, had been engineering a takeover by the Marxist MPLA; Cubans and Soviets had begun arriving to lend it support.

President Gerald Ford, seeking to block the installation of a Marxist, Soviet-aligned regime in Angola, proposed stepping up aid to Angola's non-Marxist guerrillas. (Until the Ford administration, US involvement in Angola had been ambivalent; since the Kennedy administration, the United States had been giving limited aid, overt and covert, to both the Portuguese colonialists and black nationalists—the latter, for the most part, Holden Roberto's FNLA. Following the January 1975 agreement among the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA to set up a transitional government, US aid to Roberto's FNLA and Savimbi's UNITA escalated, with some $32 million going to the nationalists in 1975.)

The Senate rejected Ford's request for an additional $28 million for the anti-MPLA forces. And in January 1976, Congress passed the "Clark amendment," prohibiting any overt or covert US aid to Angolan liberation movements. Thus an unimpeded Kremlin could initiate the brilliant strategy of using Cuban surrogates to expand its colonial power.

By July, with thousands of Cuban troops and massive amounts of Soviet weaponry, the MPLA forced the FNLA back to Zaire; by August, UNITA had to retreat to Huambo, in Angola's central highlands, and the Soviet-backed MPLA was in full control of the national government. After 400 years of Portuguese colonial rule, Angola had now become a colony of the Soviet Union.

The ruling MPLA became the country's only legal political party, with Neto installed as president of a Soviet-style government. (Neto died in 1979; Jose Eduardo dos Santos succeeded him, still in office as of this writing.) Free elections have yet to be held in the Marxist-Leninist state.

When some 20,000 Cuban troops led by Soviet advisors attacked Savimbi in Huambo in February 1976, he had to retreat into Terras do Fin do Mundo. It was Savimbi's Long March. For four months, Savimbi and his troops were running every day, not sleeping in the same place two nights in a row. Like Mao and his men during their Long March, many of Savimbi's guerrillas had to "eat their belts." Starting with 3,000 followers, Savimbi ended up with 67. More than 800 had died, the rest splintered off or were lost. Now Savimbi began to rebuild.

A major break for Savimbi came with another development in Africa—the Shaba Offensive of March 1977. Remnants of Moise Tshombe's Katangas, in eastern Angola since the '60s, were now working for the Soviets and the MPLA. (Tshombe had led an armed secessionist movement in Zaire's Katanga province in 1962. When it failed, many of his troops—Katangas—fled across the border into the Angolan bush.) When the Katangas attacked Zaire's Shaba province, Zaire's President Mobutu figured he was next on the Kremlin's hit list. Savimbi began to receive tons of weapons from France, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Zaire, and several other black African states, all alarmed now at Soviet designs on central Africa. From November 1979 through April 1980 China sent UNITA several hundred tons of weapons and military equipment via South Africa. And South Africa turned over to Savimbi's forces large quantities of Soviet arms captured in raids on SWAPO camps in southwestern Angola.

Meanwhile, as Soviet-style totalitarian oppression in the rest of Angola hit full stride, refugees and recruits for FALA (Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola, the army of UNITA) began pouring into what UNITA calls "Free Angola," then limited to a stronghold in southern Cuando Cubango province. By 1981, Savimbi was strong enough to assume the offensive against the MPLA.

Today, UNITA claims that it controls over one-third of Angola as a state within a state, exercises substantial control over an additional third—together that's an area much larger than the state of Texas—and is steadily advancing into the remaining third.

No one ever forgets a welcome rally for visitors to "Free Angola." A thousand cheering tribesmen and women, all waving paper UNITA flags (the black cockerel, symbol of UNITA, greeting the rising sun) and pictures of Savimbi. Dozens of pounding drums. Trilling tin whistles. In the middle of the African bush, a rock band with three electric guitars, their chords pumped through huge amplifiers powered by portable generators. Savimbi's personal cheerleaders, a group of 30 singers called the "Third of August Chorus" (Savimbi's birthday) singing Tam-pa-du-la-chi-wa, Tam-pa-du-la-chi-wa (many thanks for coming). A battalion of soldiers at attention with G-3 carbines, smartly dressed in clean, pressed uniforms. Scores of Savimbi's bodyguards in dark blue uniforms and maroon berets watchfully patrolling the area, all sporting captured Soviet AK-47 Kalashnikov rifles. And towering above everyone, giant banners depicting MiGs and red-starred tanks bombing and shelling villages, a UNITA boot stomping Cuban soldiers into the dust, Savimbi with an AK-47 held high, and six-foot-high letters demanding in Portuguese and French: Russians and Cubans Get Out of Angola!

A convoy of trucks emerges from the bush. A flat-bed Mercedes Uni-Mog with a Soviet antiaircraft gun mounted on the bed and attendant crew. Several big Soviet URAL trucks piled high with heavily armed guerrillas and loaded down with AKs, rocket launchers, grenade launchers, recoilless rifles, bazookas, machine guns, and even a ground-to-air missile or two.

Everyone in the crowd goes berserk as a green Toyota Land Cruiser pulls into view. Out steps a very powerfully built, bearded man with long, muscled arms, ample paunch, a .357 Ruger on his hip and three gold stars on his green beret: Savimbi. He strides up to me and shakes my hand, but I cannot hear a word, because the Third of August girls have surrounded us and are yelling A-mai-a-wey-a-loy-yah (Mother, I want to go and fight) at peak output. The general is surrounded by officers sharply attired in French-Moroccan camouflage outfits, all saluting him and stomping their feet. Soon I am in the back of a URAL with 30 or so guerrillas, bound for Jamba, Savimbi's capital.

The first thing that struck me upon entering Jamba, or any UNITA village, was its cleanliness. In startling contrast to most African villages, there are no piles of garbage, no foul odors; all foot paths and huts are swept clean; hygienic latrines are everywhere. In the dining hut, lunch is served on a table with a clean blue tablecloth, clean white china, and clean glasses. It is delicious: rice and buffalo steak with gravy, Lion beer and Fleur du Cap wine (from South Africa), Angolan coffee. In my hut, I have a foam-mattress bed with clean sheets, electric light, and washroom with a water-tank shower. This VIP visitor's treatment is not roughing it in the African bush.

The Operational Room of the UNITA general staff is set deep in a concrete bunker at Jamba. On the walls are huge maps and a board with head shots of the MPLA leaders, provincial governors, and FAPLA (MPLA's army) officers. Some have an "X" across them, signifying that they have been taken out. Present are Brig. Renato Mateus, chief of the Ops Room staff, Brig. Palanga of UNITA's Politburo, Brig. Demosthenes Chilingutila, chief of the general staff, and other officers. Col. Wamba Casitu, chief of military intelligence, gives the briefing.

According to Casitu, there are now in Angola about 1,500 Soviet advisors; 2,500 East Germans, who operate the vast network of informers and secret police; 3,500 assorted East Blockers—Polish, Czech, and Bulgarian technicians; and 40,000 Cubans (4,000–5,000 guarding oil installations in Cabinda province, with 5,000 civilian workers and 12,000 soldiers in Angola proper).

As with many claims regarding the military strength and control of Angola's warring forces, the number of Soviet, Cuban, and East Bloc personnel in Angola has not been verified by Western observers. For example, while various accounts in the Western press have given figures similar to those that UNITA reports, the US State Department puts the figures somewhat lower. According to department spokesman Robert Bruce, there are between 23,000 and 25,000 Cuban combat troops and about 5,000 civilians in Angola, and East Bloc advisors number about 2,500.

Much of the uncertainty about such information derives from the Luanda government's refusal to allow Western journalists and other visitors to observe its operations. (Moreover, there is no US embassy in Angola—since the US government does not recognize Angola's present government—so US government information about Angolan affairs tends to be somewhat limited and sketchy.) For instance, in regard to Casitu's claim that 4,000 to 5,000 Cubans guard oil installations in Cabinda province, I had spoken with various visitors to Angola during my sojourn in Africa who told me about Cuban troops in Cabinda, including a Brazilian businessman who had been to the oil fields and was on his way there again. On the other hand, Gulf Oil, which holds the principal concession to the Cabinda oil fields, maintains that no Cubans guard its installations there—"the only 'protection' necessary," Gulf vice-president William Moffett recently wrote in a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, "is provided by the Angolan police."

FAPLA, the MPLA army, stands at 80,000, according to Casitu, including regular army, special forces, security, borderguards, police, and local militias. (By contrast, the US State Department puts this figure at 130,000.) Casitu reported 3,000–5,000 SWAPO guerrillas, based in the western town of Calulo, all armed and equipped by the MPLA—even with FAPLA uniforms, so it is hard to tell them apart. There are also three battalions (about 1,000) of African National Congress (ANC) guerrillas—Soviet-aided South African urban terrorists based in Mozambique—being trained in northwest Angola. Finally, there are a few contingents of Katanga mercenaries headquartered in eastern Angola on the Benguela Railway.

The MPLA employs the Cubans to secure the big towns, such as Huambo and Luanda, Casitu explained, while FAPLA garrisons towns of lesser importance. The regime's main goal now is to protect the major economic centers. A 7:00 P.M. military curfew is in effect in all towns, including the capital. No main roads are serviceable for any appreciable distance. The Benguela Railway has been shut down completely. While FAPLA is rapidly increasing a forcible conscription, on average, Casitu reports, about 100 civilians per day and six FAPLA soldiers per week are deserting to UNITA-controlled areas.

The colonel describes how UNITA is now on the offensive, the MPLA on the defensive, a claim that coincides with recent reports by various Western journalists. Almost no FAPLA units are mobile but are garrisoned in defensive, static positions. Even the Cubans, Casitu reports, rarely go out on offensive patrols any more. The Soviets have recently been increasing war materiel. But, he continued, there doesn't seem to be any way the Soviets can overcome the problem of collapsing morale among FAPLA troops.

UNITA operates in 22 military regions throughout Angola, Casitu explains, with 15- to 150-man "dispersed" and "compact" guerrilla teams, 500-man semiregular battalions, plus antiaircraft, intelligence, engineering, and urban commando teams. There are now, the colonel says, about 15,000 semiregulars and 12,000 guerrillas and commandos, and recruits from all over Angola are arriving continually at the main training camp at Jamba, which graduates about 1,000 men every three months. After basic training, other camps handle logistics, communications, quartermaster, transport, commando school, intelligence, artillery, and engineering.

In the fall of 1983, UNITA claimed to control the entire region south of the Benguela Railway from the Zaire-Zambia border to the Kuito-Menongue road, an area of some 150,000 square miles. Nearly all the towns, villages, and government garrisons within this area have been captured (including, very recently, Cazombo and satellite garrisons in eastern Moxico province). Only the town of Cuito Cuanavale, in Cuando Cubango province, is still in MPLA control. But it is surrounded by UNITA forces and can only be supplied by air.

In addition, Casitu reported, UNITA exercises increasing control north of the railway between the Luzo-Saurimo and Melanje-Kuito roads. South Africa, he noted, exercises effective control of Cunene, Huila, and Mogamedes provinces in its war against SWAPO. The winter '83–spring '84 offensive would see UNITA expanding west toward Huambo and Luanda and east toward some of the world's most productive diamond mines. Casitu said UNITA had sent an official warning to Great Britain that the British guards there would be in mortal danger if they remained. (The British government told REASON that it has had no contact with UNITA but acknowledged UNITA's public statements that foreign citizens should leave the area.)

While UNITA's claims about the size of the area it controls have often been echoed in press reports, there remain among Western observers conflicting accounts of UNITA-controlled territory. Says US State Department spokesman Bruce: "It's hard to say how much UNITA controls. When UNITA moves around they claim territory but avoid attacking government strongholds." Nonetheless, within the past year journalists witnessing UNITA tactical excursions attest to the guerrillas' increasing territorial control and ease of movement into and around areas formerly thought to have been in the Luanda government's control. And by mid-February this year there were reports that Savimbi's forces had advanced to the Zaire border in northeast Angola and were in a position to attack the diamond mines in that area.

The MPLA's air force, according to Casitu, has only 60–70 aircraft, including about a dozen MI-24 gun-hips that arrived last fall from the Soviets, a few MiG 17s and 21s, and AN-26 transports, all flown by Cuban or East German pilots. But UNITA has captured so many antiaircraft weapons from the enemy, reported Casitu, that the MPLA's air power is all but neutralized. Although UNITA has received outside help from several countries, such as Morocco, the Ivory Coast, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and China, the great majority of its weapons, Casitu said, are Soviet-made, captured from the enemy.

After the briefing, a tour of Jamba is in order. Here is the administrative center of UNITA's health system. Throughout its area of control, UNITA operates five central hospitals—three south of the Benguela Railway, two north—and 211 regional hospitals and local clinics.

At Jamba there are maternity wards (two births a day average); rehab and post-operative-care wards; two wards for combat injuries; a surgical operating room with anesthesia and sterilization equipment (average three operations a day—appendectomies, hernias, war injuries, and so on); and a laboratory equipped for basic analyses.

Even though all of this is housed in a collection of thatch huts with sand floors, everything is as spotless as the hospital staff's white smocks. A team of six French doctors and nurses had been on the plane with me, and they were visibly impressed. Helene Audrain, a nurse with Medicins Sans Frontiers, a Paris-based private medical-aid society, who has served in Uganda, Chad, Cameroun, and on the Thai-Cambodian border, had never seen anything like it. "For a guerrilla army," she remarked, "*c'est incroyable*."

The French doctors were similarly impressed with the organizational structure of UNITA's health system. The medical staff at Jamba—there is only one M.D.; others on the staff had served in Angolan Portuguese-run hospitals—asked the right questions of the French visitors and knew just what was needed. "We could rid all of Free Angola of TB in six months if we had the supplies," commented one of the doctors, "because the system is already organized so well."

The UNITA-owned clothing factory is next. With five pattern cutters and 20 sewers operating foot-pedal-driven Singers, the plant churns out ladies' and children's dresses, shirts, pants, caps—and 1,000 uniforms a month.

UNITA's truck repair and weapon-restoration shops house a wide variety of precision lathes and large power-driven machine tools for constructing spare parts and repairing damaged equipment and weapons. Engines and 'motors are overhauled here, and the URAL truck engines, which don't work efficiently in hot weather, are being converted from gasoline to diesel.

Some distance from Jamba is an agricultural center—run by both UNITA and local villagers' cooperatives—with 15 hectares, irrigated courtesy of Bulgarian pipe captured at Mavinga in 1981. The last harvest yielded 55 tons of vegetables, including the most enormous cabbages—they must weigh 20–25 pounds.

UNITA is singularly proud, however, of its educational system. UNITA reports that thousands of parents have fled MPLA-controlled areas to avoid child-hunts, which take their kids off to Cuba's "Isle of Youth" (the Isle of Pines) to turn them into obedient Castro-Marxists (similar reports come from Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, and São Tomé). The parents bring their children instead to UNITA schools. There is thus a primary school in every village, agricultural center, and guerrilla base in UNITA-controlled Angola, numbering close to 1,000. I would be visiting several during the next month. The curriculum includes Portuguese, spelling, reading, composition, and grammar; arithmetic and geometry; history and geography of Angola; natural science and local flora and fauna; and basic hygiene.

There are 15 secondary schools, such as the one named after Lote Savimbi some 50 kilometers from Jamba. Classes are held either open-air or in thatch huts, furnished with log benches and tables and decorated with gaily painted animal bones, colored sand, plants, and flowers. I saw classes in trigonometry, algebra, and solid geometry; physics and chemistry (the lecture I attended was on electrolysis); and—so help me—Latin! Most students were high-school age, all dressed well and attentive, but there were several mothers with babies underfoot—and even one teacher instructing at a blackboard with a baby strapped to her back.

Turning the tables on the Marxists, UNITA gives a political context to its instruction. An English lesson on the blackboard: "We want our liberty and to be free of the colonialism of the Russians and Cubans." "L'histoire de l'Angola," a French lesson goes, "sera faite avec l'UNITA, et jamais contra l'UNITA" (The history of Angola will be written with UNITA, never against UNITA). And there's this Latin lesson: "De Rationibus Belli UNITAE" (The reasons for the war of UNITA)…"In hoc bello, Savimbi, dux prae clarissimus, suum populum ad victoriam diriget" (In this war, Savimbi, far-seeing general, leads his people to victory)…"Omnis gentes contra russos, cubanos, atque hostes MPLAE pugnat" (All the people fight against the Russian, Cuban, and MPLA hosts).

I was to spend more than a month inside Angola, traveling with Savimbi some 2,500 kilometers through UNITA-held territory, over roads that are part of UNITA's own road network that crisscrosses many thousands of miles of its territory. We were to journey all the way up to Munango (captured in April 1983) on the Benguela Railway. Savimbi hadn't returned to his birthplace since his Long March; it was a moment of historic triumph for him and UNITA.

At almost every village or guerrilla base we pass, Savimbi stops and speaks. He is fluent in seven languages—Portuguese, English, French, Umbundu. Chokwe, Luchesse, and Ganguela—and he is an orator of Churchillian proportions in every one. At Sakutala, for instance, he holds forth for 45 minutes in a voice that never falters, never misses a beat. In a football field-size area, several hundred guerrillas and several hundred more villagers can clearly hear Savimbi's every word.

"Why have we been fighting for all these years, first against the Portuguese, now against the Russians and the Cubans?" he asks them. "It is to be masters of ourselves—for each of us to be master of his own life, and not for me to be master of your life, not for the party to be master of your life, but for you to be master of your own life. For if each of you is free to grow your own food on your own land, to work for yourself to make a good life for yourself and your family, this is the way you will help your country—this is the way we will work together to build a free and prosperous Angola. Will you help me throw the Russians out of Angola? [A multitude of voices scream, "Yes!"] Will you help me throw the Cubans out of Angola? ["Yes!"] Are you willing to *fight* for your freedom and the freedom of your country? ["Yes!"] Then together, we will succeed."

The crowd erupts in explosive chants as hundreds of Soviet Kalashnikovs are thrust high in the air: "Out with the Cubans! Out with the Russians! Death to Marxism! Vive the independence of Angola! Vive Savimbi!"

This militaristic, revolutionary fervor runs high within UNITA. During a conversation with Savimbi, I once inquired about the possibility of a negotiated settlement rather than a military victory. "We will continue to fight until the MPLA agrees to hold free general elections," Savimbi told me. "That is what we are fighting for, as elections have never been held in the entire history of Angola.

"There is a faction in the MPLA—called the 'Catete Group'—that would like to make peace with us," he continued. "But they are afraid that if they make overtures to us, the Soviets will kill them, à la Afghanistan. So the pro-Soviet hardliners in the MPLA, such as Lucio Lara and Paulo Jorge, have the upper hand. We also realize that the Soviets always negotiate in bad faith and never in good faith. So we must continue to fight, and continue to win, which is what we are doing."

I think back to a conversation, three weeks earlier, with Paulo Saheque, a captured second lieutenant in the MPLA army's 39th Brigade. In March 1983, the 39th Brigade, Saheque told me, tried to surprise a UNITA encampment near Andulo, in Bié province. Finding it deserted, the 39th Brigade troops in frustration attacked the closest village they could find, setting fire to every hut and killing every living thing in the village, including chickens and dogs. Forty-eight defenseless men, women, and children, Saheque recounted, were shot in cold blood. Forty-five Cubans, led by Lt. Col. Diego Hernandez, accompanied the MPLA soldiers, and Saheque says he personally witnessed them participate in the massacre. According to the prisoner, this is standard MPLA army and Cuban procedure, as they consider virtually the entire civilian population to be helping UNITA and all young men as potential guerrillas.

To be here as an outsider witnessing a protracted guerrilla war in the African bush is to be confronted by a situation that does not easily yield to neat, Western-style evaluation. While Saheque's story translates into vivid, concrete images the brutal nature of the MPLA rulers—a regime that, Amnesty International reports, routinely detains political prisoners (often torturing them) and liberally administers the death penalty to such prisoners after only a semblance of a trial, if any—there have been occasional reports in the Western press that UNITA has committed acts that would seem to violate the rights of innocent parties.

I have spoken with some of UNITA's prisoners, and all seem relatively comfortable—unharmed and unabused. Yet it is true, for instance, that when unit A overtakes a town, the guerrillas round up the villagers and resettle them in UNITA-controlled areas. It may well be that since such towns often become battle zones UNITA is acting responsibly by protecting lives that otherwise might perish from MPLA or UNITA bullets. Most resettled villagers that I have seen appear not to protest relocation; but I have on occasion seen some who appear confused and upset by having been moved from their home and put under the authority of a band of guerrillas.

Moreover, I am not sure what to make of various reports such as Amnesty International's claim that "UNITA representatives have on several occasions indicated that prisoners were being executed." I have not witnessed any executions. I know that UNITA does take both prisoners of war and civilian hostages (usually foreigners who have dealings with the Luanda government, though Amnesty International reports that in 1982 UNITA took hostage some unarmed Red Cross employees). The hostage-taking is a practice that Savimbi openly acknowledges and for which he makes no apologies; he claims to have issued public warnings that foreign civilians dealing with the Luanda government and its forces are subject to capture and that they are in Angola at their own risk.

Amnesty International also reports that UNITA agents explode bombs in public places (at markets, for example) in MPLA-controlled towns, including populous Luanda. When I asked Savimbi about such activities he told me that UNITA does very little of this—the MPLA often responds to such incidents with brutal reprisals against suspected UNITA abettors, he explained.

And if one were to take a survey of civil and economic freedoms in UNITA-controlled territory, the findings would be difficult to interpret. For instance, there is really no free market in this area. But one wonders how there could be: for one thing, there is no currency; for another, unit A feels compelled to direct the allocation of villagers' farm produce to assure that all—villagers and troops alike—have enough food. But in return, in a sort of informal quid pro quo manner, UNITA provides villagers with health care, schooling, and protection. (There may be reason to wonder just how much of this feudal state would change if Savimbi were to come into power; for in a 1981 UNITA statement of its economic agenda for Angola, education and health care were said to be the "right" of all and would be provided "free" by the state. That was 1981; Savimbi's views may have changed since then.)

After a month of first-hand observation, the complexities of the situation—for example, the tribal organization of the Angolan populace (to many of whom the concept of a pantribal Angolan nation must be as foreign as this Western journalist in their midst), an illiteracy rate of some 90 percent, the legacy of 400 years of colonial rule—still defy easy analysis. Here in the African bush, nothing is clear-cut.

Back near Jamba, as I prepare to leave "Free Angola," the dust from 4,000 dancing feet is swirling into the sky above the dirt airstrip hacked out of the sandy scrub jungle. Drums are pounding, flags are waving, the crowd is singing—all egged on by the tireless Third of August cheerleaders.

These last five weeks had been a very intense experience, emotionally and physically exhausting. Almost a quarter of my time, day and night, had been spent riding in Soviet-made trucks over the most tortuous bush tracks imaginable. I was constantly frustrated by the unrelieved lack of spontaneity of my UNITA hosts: everything had to be a "program," a formal state visit. I was tired of the comic theatricality—people always saluting and stomping their feet—and of having a 17-man bodyguard carrying rocket launchers and machine guns around me every place I went. Tired, too, of the Maoist rallies and slogans, the politicization of everything.

Yet I had gotten around enough on my own to believe that the cleanliness, enthusiasm, motivation, and dedication, the roads, schools, clinics, and military prowess, are for real—not a Potemkin facade. These people are determined to be taken seriously. Sometimes they overdid it, but I cannot doubt their earnestness, their pride, their sense of mission.

I wave goodbye to everyone and am about to step on board the plane. Savimbi puts his hand on my shoulder. "Remember, Jack, this is a high-stakes game. There is a lot of oil in Angola, plus vast mineral wealth. But above that, while we are fighting for our freedom and not yours, this is the front line in the battle between the East and the West."

Savimbi takes my hand and gives me a strong farewell embrace. I have learned that he is skilled at saying what his listeners want to hear. And I know that it is easy for him to demand and fight for free elections, because he is sure that he would win. But I also know the leftist mentality and Savimbi just doesn't seem to have it.

Savimbi is nobody's puppet. He is not South Africa's, and he will not be America's. Above all, Savimbi is an Angolan nationalist, and he will do whatever it takes to secure the freedom and prosperity of his country. But he repeatedly states his conviction that individual political and economic freedom are important elements in achieving that goal.

Savimbi may very well become the most dynamic and outstanding leader in Africa, if not the entire Third World. For it is possible, perhaps even likely, that he will hand the Soviets a major colonial defeat and that he will eventually be president of Angola. And once he is, the political history of Africa may embark in a different direction.

Jack Wheeler has a Ph.D. in philosophy. He wrote the article "How to Dismantle the Soviet Empire" that appeared in REASON *in November 1983. This article is a project of the Reason Foundation Investigative Journalism Fund.*

The New Anti-Colonialism

It is perhaps not surprising that, in the struggle to throw off Western colonialism, so many of the Third World's "national liberation movements" have embraced the anti-capitalist, anti-Western ideology of Marxist-Leninist socialism. And they often have had the backing—military, economic, and rhetorical—of the Soviet Union.

Today, however, this association is rapidly becoming a relic of the past. What is emerging might be called "the second stage" of post–World War II anticolonialism.

To investigate this new phenomenon of anti-Soviet liberation movements, I went to southwestern Asia, Africa, and Central America, going clandestinely into freedom fighters' territory. Each case was different, but I found a growing rejection of Soviet imperialism throughout the Third World.

There are wars of liberation in eight parts of the Soviet Empire right now—in Nicaragua, Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The emergence of these anti-Soviet armed insurgencies points to the end of Soviet expansionism and the start of its contraction. More and more of the Third World is realizing that Soviet Marxism is a one-way ticket to oppression and poverty. The Soviet Empire may, at last, be on the verge of breaking up.

Believing that Savimbi's UNITA is the guerrilla group that now has the best chance of defeating the Soviet imperialists, I have written the first of my REASON reports on Angola.
—J.W.

"Angola Is the Key to Africa"

Over the course of my visit with Angola's UNITA guerrilla forces last fall, I spent many hours speaking with UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. We discussed a number of issues during those talks, and here are Savimbi's answers to some questions I asked.

Where does your money come from?
"Although aid from our Arab and Chinese friends has stopped, about six or so black-African countries help us with nonmilitary supplies like medicines. We have enough weapons, ammunition, and trucks to last us for some time, and we are continually capturing more. South Africa supplies all the generator and motor fuel we require gratis, as well as allowing us to receive supplies from other African countries through Namibia. Last year, we sold five million dollars' worth of lumber from our timber and sawmill facilities to South Africa, which enabled us to purchase clothing and food. Further, a number of European businessmen are starting to do business with us, on very good terms, as they are realizing we are going to win.

"Incidentally, I should add that there is not one single country in black Africa that is hot doing business with South Africa. While many of them try to hide it, we do not; we have nothing to hide or apologize for."

With its defunct economy, where does Angola's government get money to pay the Cubans for their support of the regime? Do the Soviets foot the bill?
"No—you do. The MPLA must pay direct to Fidel Castro 100 US dollars per day per Cuban. That's clean to Castro, for the Cubans' expenses—food, shelter, etc., are extra.

"Eighty percent of the Luanda government's foreign-exchange earnings of over $1 billion a year comes from royalties from Gulf Oil, which has the principal concession in the oil fields in Angola's Cabinda province. In effect, Gulf Oil is paying hundreds of millions of dollars to Fidel Castro for Cuban mercenaries to support a Soviet communist government against anticommunist guerrillas that are fighting to establish a pro-Western, pro-free-enterprise democracy in Angola. Every time you buy gasoline for your car from a Gulf station, some of your money goes to Castro. It is, how do you say, kafkaesque."

[For the record, it is impossible to check out Savimbi's claim that Gulf directly provides the Luanda government with 80 percent of its foreign-exchange earnings—an amount that would total at least $800 million or so; for neither Gulf nor the Luanda government releases this information to the public. Western analysts estimate that 80 to 90 percent of Luanda's foreign-exchange earnings come from Cabinda oil, and Gulf's concession is estimated to be about 80 percent of the total Cabinda production. Under its concession contract, Gulf pays to the Luanda government royalties, taxes, and other fees on its share of Cabinda oil—an amount that does add up to hundreds of millions of dollars. In response to what Savimbi calls a "kafkaesque" situation, however, John Sassi, Gulf's manager of international public policy, states that "Gulf cannot withhold payments from or make payments to anyone but that government" (with whom Gulf has the concession contract). "Indeed," Sassi states, "it is beyond the Company's power or responsibilities to direct the disposition and use of any funds paid to any host government," and, "our commercial dealings with a country in no way constitute an endorsement of all the actions of that country's government."]

What are your views on socialism and capitalism?
"To begin with, Russian socialism is just the exportation of poverty. The Marxist economic model has failed everywhere it has been applied. It is important for everyone in a society to have a personal incentive, to be free to earn his own living and pay his own way, to feel he is productive and not being given something for nothing.

"The state, on the other hand, should be the referee—or like a policeman directing traffic where everyone is driving his own car. The state has to have a share large businesses like oil or diamonds so it will have the money to make loans to smaller private businesses. The state must also set the basic economic priorities. We must, for example, develop the countryside before the cities—not the other way around, which has been such a disaster in the Third World. The MPLA wants an urban proletariat and heavy industries, which are totally uncompetitive on world markets. We should have many dispersed and decentralized smaller industries, encouraging free enterprise to flourish." [Some readers may be pleased to know that I gave Savimbi my copy of Milton and Rose Friedman's Free to Choose.]

How would a UNITA victory change the political situation in southern Africa?
"Very dramatically. Take Namibia. We're now drifting towards a Middle East–like situation, with South Africa in the role of Israel and SWAPO analogous to the PLO. But with a UNITA victory, SWAPO would no longer have a sanctuary in Angola, nor anywhere else. They would have to abandon guerrilla war and subject themselves to a democratic process in Namibia. Thus, a solution to Namibia means a solution to Angola first. For once the Cubans and SWAPO are gone from Angola, South Africa will have no more excuses."

[At press time, South Africa had begun to withdraw its troops from southwest Angola, where they have been fighting SWAPO guerrillas who seek to wrest control of Namibia from South Africa and have been allowed by the Angolan government to base their military operations in southwest Angola. The withdrawal of troops is seen both as the South African government's attempt to scale down a costly military effort that is losing popular support

at home and as a prelude to further negotiations over Namibia.

Namibia (South-West Africa) is a former German colony that South Africa occupied after World War I under a League of Nations mandate. The United Nations revoked that mandate in 1966, but South Africa has refused to withdraw.

In negotiations to settle the Namibian problem, South Africa has insisted that it will not withdraw and allow free elections unless the Cubans leave Angola. South Africa fears that the Cubans would engineer a takeover of an independent Namibia by the Marxist SWAPO, and it does not want a Marxist state along its borders.

Angola's MPLA government, however, insists that it will not send the Cubans home unless South Africa withdraws from Namibia, fearing that without the Cubans' military support, Angola would be at the mercy of South African forces based in Namibia. Some observers say that Angola's real fear is that without Cuban support, its regime would fall to UNITA.

The question for UNITA, on the other hand, is what would happen if South Africa, in settling the Namibian issue, withdraws its support for the guerrilla group. Given UNITA's dependence on South Africa for basic necessities like fuel and weapons, its fate without such support is uncertain. And the US government has indicated that if Angola expels the Cubans, it will recognize the MPLA government, an offer that carries the promise of foreign aid.]

"We are confident that a UNITA victory in Angola will signify the end of Soviet expansionism in Africa, initiating instead its contraction. We think, for example, that the Soviet-backed regime of Samora Machel in Mozambique would not last long and that Soviet influence in general would be greatly diminished throughout the continent.

"As for South Africa itself—we, of course, abhor apartheid. But we recognize that it is based on fear. Democracy and human rights have had a tragic and shabby history in black Africa. A democratic, pro-free-enterprise Angola will help ease that fear. We intend to extend diplomatic relations to South Africa and offer a Christian solution to its problems, criticizing it from a helpful position, not a confrontational one. Apartheid will be overcome, internally, by South Africa's younger generation—and not through a guerrilla war backed by the Russians."

Why do you think the West isn't supporting UNITA fully in its fight against Soviet imperialism?
"Why are there massive riots and demonstrations by people in Western Europe over American missiles aimed at Russia and not Russian missiles aimed at them? It's a disgrace. I think it must be the Third World that has to give the West the courage to oppose the Soviet Union and stand up for its ideals, not the other way around—to provide a cure for what Solzhenitsyn calls the 'Western Disease.' That is why we say, 'UNITA is the key to Angola, Angola is the key to Africa, Africa is the key to the West.'"

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